



International
Federation
of Journalists

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UN Special Session on Iraq: IFJ Urges Accountability for Atrocities Committed against Journalists

The International Federation of Journalists, the world's largest professional organisation of journalists, representing over 600.000 journalists in 134 countries, wishes to commend the Council for holding this special session on atrocities committed by the self-proclaimed Islamic State and **other armed** groups in Iraq.

The IFJ's primary role is to promote and defend the rights of journalists, especially the right to life and physical safety. In this regard, we constantly monitor the violations of our members' rights around the world and we publish annual reports on journalists and media staff killed for no other reason than the legitimate practice of their profession.

The recent and most egregious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates in Iraq, including the beheading of American journalists James Foley, have outraged the conscience of the world community and were widely condemned.

The world is witnessing the reign of terror these groups have unleashed in areas under their control under which journalists have been among their primary targets for years in **Iraq and Syria**. For the last three years, journalists have been targeted, kidnapped and murdered by the many militias fighting in Iraq and across in Syria.

More than 350 journalists and media workers, Iraqi and foreign reporters alike, lost their lives to violence in Iraq since the country's invasion of 2003. They include at least 13 killed in 2013, five of whom were killed in one incident at their place of work on 23 December last year, when gunmen carried out a suicide attack on the headquarters of *Salaheddin* TV in the northern Iraqi city of Tikrit. Six more journalists have been killed since the start of this year, including Fatima Omar AbdelKarim who died earlier this week in a terrorist blast.

The International Federation of Journalists, working with our member in the country, the Iraqi Journalists' Syndicate, has since been campaigning to secure justice for the victims and their families.

We welcome the unified reaction of the international community in calling for the IS killers of American journalist James Foley to be held accountable. However, we regret the lack of urgency in investigating the hundreds of journalists' murders in Iraq which remain unresolved to this day.

Even during the years of the country's steady recovery and return to peace, there seemed to be no end to the long waiting of killed journalists' families to see justice. Some states, members of the coalition in the Iraqi invasion and whose forces were involved in incidents which led to journalists' killings, also refused to investigate these killings or cooperate in identifying those responsible.



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A case in point is the failure by the United States to order independent investigations of numerous incidents in which journalists lost their lives at the hand of the US military, including the attack on Hotel Palestine on 8 April 2003, the killings of ITV crew members Terry Lloyd, Fred Nerac and local translator Hussein Osman the Shatt al-Basra bridge outside Basra on 22 March the same year.

In the meanwhile, Iraqi journalists remained in the firing line from press predators, emboldened by the absence of accountability as deterrence for their actions against media professionals.

The culture of impunity for violence against journalists continues to fuel attacks by those who regard journalists as unwelcome witnesses to the war's litany of tragedies, both individual and collective.

Yet, attacks on media professionals constitute not only crimes against the victims and cause great sorrow for their loved ones, they also prevent the world from learning about the terrible wrongs done to innocent civilians and mobilising for action to protect the most vulnerable in Iraq, leading to the present humanitarian crisis.

Indeed, James Foley spoke for many of his colleagues who lost their lives "trying to expose untold stories." There is no doubt that the gross abuses committed by the IS and associated groups in Iraq which the Council is debating today would not have come to light without the courageous work of many journalists, at the risk of their lives.

It is therefore appropriate that they should be addressed in an uncompromising manner and adequate strategies adopted to hold these groups accountable for their actions, We further believe that a strong commitment to protect journalists should be an important part of any initiative in this regard and urge the Council to develop including a clear strategy to hold to account all belligerents in Iraq responsible for killing journalists.

As the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions noted in his report to this Council in 2012, press freedom, as a corollary of the freedom of expression which, is considered a 'meta-right', i.e the right on which the realisation of many other rights depends.

For the abuses of human rights reported in Iraq represent a serious threat to international order and security by defying all norms of humanitarian international and human rights law. If left unchecked, their trail of loss of life and further human suffering including starvation and enforced disappearances on an unimaginable scale is likely to continue.

The international community must therefore take a stand against these acts targeting civilians, including journalists, which could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Members of this Council and of the United Nations as whole need to make it unequivocally clear that the actions by the IS and associated groups can no longer be tolerated in Iraq or elsewhere because their consequences would be more than humanity could bear.



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Finally, with this special session taking place two months ahead of the marking of the first UN Day against impunity for crime targeting journalists on 2 November, we respectfully urge this Council to address the situation of media protection in Iraq by:

- Calling on the government of Iraq to investigate all cases of journalists' murders which remain unresolved and extending all assistance needed for this purpose, under the UN Action Plan for the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity ;
- Condemning all abductions of journalists by the self-proclaimed Islamic State and associate groups in Iraq and demanding immediate release of all journalists currently detained by these groups both in Iraq and Syria;
- Establishing a special unit in the Office of the High Commissioner to develop early warning system over the threat to journalists , in close collaboration with UNESCO, the International Federation of Journalists other organisations defending the safety of journalists for a timely action;
- Organising regular debates, preferably on the UN Day against impunity for crime against journalists to review strategies and agree on new initiatives, in consultation with journalists' organisations and representatives;
- Consider these recommendations for adoption by this special session to send as a strong message as possible.

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